



Trekking onto

At the controls of the Starship Enterprise, Hikaru Sulu was used to travelling at warp speed on a daily basis. His alter ego, George Takei, took a slightly slower route to get to Australia. On his recent visit, *What DVD* was able to ask him about *Star Trek's* long awaited materialisation on DVD.

WORDS: JAMES COTTEE





How do you feel about the release the original series of *Star Trek* on DVD?

Are you involved?

I'm delighted that it's coming out again, because it's what gave birth to the *Star*

Trek phenomenon back in the '60s. People have only been watching it at one o'clock in the morning on the ten zillionth rerun now, so with this collector's DVD set coming out, it's something that they're going to be able to watch in pristine form. [They'll be able to see it] as we did it, way back then. I'm particularly delighted because they see us young and vital – that's why I think we're doing this as a print interview, rather than a television interview, so there won't be that comparison of the look.



'60s. Two great powers threatening each other with nuclear annihilation, and we had as a member of our leadership team a trusted member who spoke with a Russian accent

Despite our progress towards peace, war still seems to be a constant threat. Do you think *Star Trek* addresses timeless concerns of the human condition?

It's amazing how specific issues that we were addressing back in the '60s, those episodes are relevant today, taking on a different kind of specificity in our times. Like terrorism, or reading in your front pages same-sex marriage, which has become a big issue here as it has become in the United States. A lot of the episodes of *Star Trek* can be viewed in the context of our times today, in the 21st Century, and still be quite relevant.

Were you involved with the DVDs? Will there be any commentary tracks?

Frankly, I don't know. My understanding is that it's all of the original series, the first season. They arranged the release date very conveniently. September is the ninth month, so it comes out on the ninth. And the second and third seasons come out in November, on the eleventh day, because November is the eleventh month. They've made it easy for me [to remember].

What do you think has been the lasting message of *Star Trek*?

Star Trek did comment on not only the human condition, but the human foibles. And how do we get to the future, if you know what I mean. We certainly look to the future with optimism, and confidence in our ability to solve problems, and confidence in our creative, inventive genius, but at the same time the lesson that we taught was that there is strength in diversity. So many nations find diversity a challenge...

Or even a threat.

Or a threat. That was the cold war then, back in the

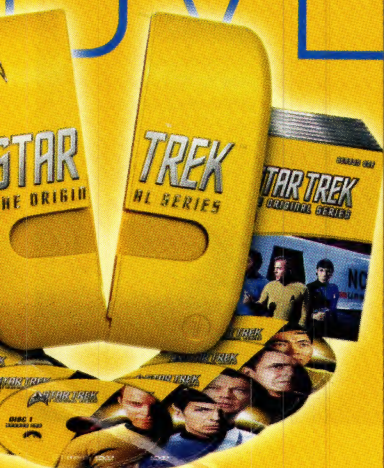
Shows like *Star Trek* stand out more and more as homogenous reality shows take over.

At the time when *Star Trek* first came on in the '60s, television was characterised as the vast wasteland. Newton Minnow, the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, characterised it as such. Gene Roddenberry wanted to bring some substance to the vast wasteland. He said that you have to look to the future with optimism. So much science fiction at that time was doom and gloom. A failed civilisation, where the apes have taken over, or it's a Big Brother civilisation where humanity is made into a monotonous, robot-like existence.

Gene was really breaking new grounds, in saying "Our future is good. We have a great future, if we have confidence in the good aspect of humanity." In *The Next Generation*, Gene maintained that view. I must say, *Star Trek* itself has gone back to that dark view of our future. Particularly with the one that was made after Gene passed – *Deep Space Nine*.

Gene's view was that the good part in us, what makes us human, what makes us different from animals, is the real human aspect. So now, with

DVD



← television going back to pap, I'm hoping that we can find another Gene Roddenberry kind of visionary.

What do you think about people labeling inspirational shows like *Trek* as mere "cult" shows?

The word "cult" seems to suggest people who show up at conventions with blue skins and antennae. I've found that the *Star Trek* audience is incredibly diverse. There was a *Star Trek* exhibit that opened at the Air & Space museum, at the Smithsonian in Washington DC, and we had a congressional opening, before it opened to the public. And I found that one of the biggest, most knowledgeable *Star Trek* fans is a US senator – Senator Patrick Leahy of the state of Vermont – and looks the farthest from a cult figure. He's distinguished-looking, he's tall, lean, bald, white hair, bespectacled, and he was chairman of the Foreign Relations committee then. And he was a rabid, knowledgeable *Star Trek* fan. You have a US senator, you have astronauts, and yes, we do have those who show up with blue skin and antennae at *Star Trek* conventions, but it's that whole diversity ... I think it's bad to characterise fans by the extremists, in the same way you wouldn't characterise baseball fans by the ones that paint their bodies and show up in the middle of winter with their shirts off, drinking beer and cheering for their baseball team.

***Trek* fans are also stigmatised as nerds.**

Like Bill Gates? It's the nerds that are bold enough to be



themselves, rather than like everybody else. It's "nerds" that are willing to take that pejorative and be what they really want to be. Gene Roddenberry, I guess, could have been considered a nerd, because he was weird.

Is there anything you'd like to say to Australian *Star Trek* fans?

We've enjoyed incredible longevity, like that Vulcan greeting "Live long and prosper." We've lived much longer than we ever expected, and prospered in so many unbelievable ways. Back in 1965, who would of thunk? So I want to say thank you. Thank you to all the fans."

RACE ACROSS THE GALAXY

Papier mache sets, jump suits, budget special effects – why does the original *Star Trek* TV series keep on keeping on? Our 1000-word mission: to seek out the reasons for its undying popularity.

WORDS: KRIS ASHTON

To understand the impact of *Star Trek*, one must first comprehend the social and political climate in which it was conceived. It originally aired in 1966 – a time when feminism was young, the Cuban missile crisis was fresh in everybody's minds and tensions between America and Soviet Russia were still as hot as a spent plutonium rod. With the assassination of JFK a few years earlier, the populace – especially young adults – were beginning to question both the status quo and the politicians that advocated it. Colonisation of other planets and total nuclear destruction seemed equally feasible outcomes.

The majority of movies throughout the 1950s and early 1960s that dealt with space travel and contact with other civilisations was not positive. For every *Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), there were half a dozen *Invaders From Mars* (1953) and *Earth Vs The Flying Saucers* (1956). The American consciousness remained dead afraid of the Red Menace and this anxiety was expressed through a wave of xenophobic films that said "make peace if you can, kill if you have to,

but never, ever try to appease".

Then along came a "gangly" gentleman known as Gene Roddenberry. Inside his fertile mind he had conceived of a future – the 23rd Century – where the human race not only survived its own violent shortcomings, but paired up with other like-minded civilisations for the greater good. Alien contact was not something to be feared, rather it would enrich the human condition. Race issues were a thing of the past: white/black American, Russian and Japanese could all get along and live without prejudice. The galaxy could be a utopia rather than a dystopia.

The Paramount studio executives, in their infinite conservatism, bucked at the idea. Specifically, they balked at the inclusion of a "Martian" (their term, not Roddenberry's), fearing the character of Mr Spock would be perceived as "satanic" among the Bible Belt viewers. But the producer held fast; he knew a benevolent alien presence was crucial to power the show.

Such resistance to Spock would continue, especially in *Star Trek's* early

days. In his memoir *I Am Spock*, Leonard Nimoy relates an anecdote where a promotional brochure for the series featured Spock with his pointed ears and eyebrows airbrushed out, leaving him looking completely human!

However, the Vulcan soon discovered his audience. People who claimed to be in contact with real alien civilisations revered Spock as a kind of interstellar ambassador who would help prepare humans for xenomorphic contact. Others took to his logical outlook on life, while female viewers pronounced his sex appeal, born of his imperviousness to seduction.

Due to its fantastical setting, *Star Trek* could cross social borders that would see other television shows censored. The episode "Plato's Stepchildren", which aired in 1968, featured the first interracial kiss ever broadcast on American TV, between Captain Kirk (William Shatner) and Lieutenant Uhura (Nichelle Nichols). There was some apprehension about how viewers, especially those in the conservative south, would receive it,

STAR TREK FOR DUMMIES

Been living under a Horta for the past 40 years? Here are some warp speed introductions to the original *Star Trek* characters.

CAPTAIN KIRK

Home planet Earth

Nationality American

Personality The

quintessential hero, Kirk can punch, kick or think his way out of any sticky situation. Speaking of sticky situations, he's also a hit with the ladies, able to score on pretty much any planet that has humanoid lifeforms with the requisite anatomy.



MR SPOCK

Home planet Vulcan

Nationality Vulcan

Personality Like many of those claiming Abstud.

Spock is half Vulcan, half human but prefers to acknowledge the Vulcan side of his personality. Hence, he is a being guided by logic and IDIC (Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations), but now and again his emotional human side will burst forth. Is also telepathic, which helps when the writers are stuck.



DR MCCOY

Home planet Earth

Nationality American

Personality An excellent physician and a man of

science, McCoy is the crabby and emotional yin to Mr Spock's coolly rational yang. Dr McCoy is given to verbal outbursts and some level of swearing depending on the censors.



MR SCOTT

Home planet Earth

Nationality Scottish

Personality The

Enterprise engineer, Mr Scott is responsible for ensuring the engines run smoothly (and accommodating Kirk's demands for greater warp speed).



MR SULU

Home planet Earth

Nationality Japanese

Personality Guides the

Enterprise around the vast reaches of space. Is competent at karate (well, competent as it was understood in 1967) and can chop his way through hordes of enemies.



MR CHEKOV

Home planet Earth

Nationality Russian

Personality Sort of a

facsimile of Mr Sulu, except he has a thick Russian accent and navigates rather than actually driving the ship. Shows no communist tendencies, which suggests Gene Roddenberry might have been more of a visionary than we thought.



UHURA

Home planet Earth

Nationality American

Personality With her

impossibly short skirts, it's not hard to see why Kirk hired Uhura as his communications officer. She spends much of her time trying to contact alien beings and living up to the odd female stereotype.





"It might be functional, but that really is a stupid haircut."

but over the years Roddenberry and Nichols have both claimed the overwhelming majority of letters were in support of the scene (although of course they got one or two expressing "concern"). Not surprisingly, activist Martin Luther King was also a tremendous fan of the series for its depiction of a black character outside a stereotypical role and encouraged Nichols to remain with *Star Trek* when she was contemplating leaving.

Although the series limped through its third year (creative and scheduling disputes kneecapped it) and was cancelled, it rose like a phoenix through syndication in the 1970s. The now-famous conventions started; *Star Trek* had somehow captured the hopes, fears and beliefs of a generation.

Yet nearly four decades after its inception – and even at its cheesiest – *Star Trek's* themes still resonate. And aside from any greater message it might have carried, *Star Trek* also benefited from strong writing and characters people not only wanted, but *needed* to watch. Below is a refresher on some of the most memorable episodes from season one, available soon on DVD.

"THE CAGE"

This pilot, which never initially went to air, featured an almost entirely different cast – in fact, only Leonard Nimoy (Spock) would return for the second pilot. Serves to highlight the undeniable chemistry the new cast members would bring.

"WHERE NO MAN HAS GONE BEFORE"

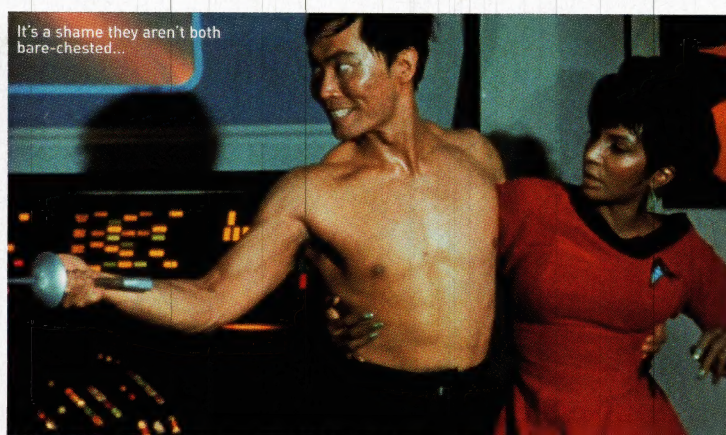
The second pilot with the refurbished cast convinced NBC to pick up the show as a regular series. Although it is technically the second episode ever made, it was actually the fourth ever screened because NBC decided to run with "The Man Trap" instead.

"THE NAKED TIME"

A favourite among fans because it depicts the hidden inner selves of the characters. An alien virus infects much of the crew, releasing their emotions. This is especially notable in the supposedly emotionless Spock, who breaks down and cries.

"THE ENEMY WITHIN"

Advocates of Captain Kirk as the coolest *Star Trek* character tend to pick this as a standout episode because it features William Shatner



It's a shame they aren't both bare-chested...

fighting an evil version of himself. It was a storyline gimmick that would be overused by the third year of *Star Trek*.

"DAGGER OF THE MIND"

If it's Vulcan lore you're after, this is the episode to watch because it introduces the famous neck pinch. Nimoy invented it for Spock because the script called for him to use a karate chop and he felt an act was out of character for a being who was opposed to violence.

"SPACE SEED"

Watching this episode helps put *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* in some kind of context. The crew discovers an ancient space vessel and rescues its occupant, Khan, from suspended animation. Turns out he's a nasty "superman" left over from the Genetics Wars of the 1990s (remember those?).

"DEVIL IN THE DARK"

More Vulcanalia here, with the inaugural use of the Vulcan mind-meld. Spock connects with a rock-creature to find out why it is killing miners (turns out they are unknowingly slaying her young).

Initially pronounced dangerous, Spock would use the meld more and more frequently.

"ERRAND OF MERCY"

Any Trekkie worth their salt knows this episode features the first appearance of The Klingons, who would, among other things, be responsible for the death of Kirk's son in years to come. The race was created by one of *Trek's* greatest writers, the irascible Gene Coon.

"THIS SIDE OF PARADISE"

Written by Dorothy Fontana, this episode is best known for its love story involving Mr Spock, who is overcome by spores.

"CITY ON THE EDGE OF FOREVER"

This episode, examining the complexities of time travel, won a Writer's Guild Award – and no wonder, with the skilful Harlan Ellison behind the typewriter. Ironically, Ellison would later accuse Gene Roddenberry of grossly rewriting his original script for no good reason. He would have a similar falling out over a proposed screenplay for the first *Star Trek* film.

Trek Glossary

GO TO A BOOK STORE AND YOU'LL FIND TOMES FULL OF *STAR TREK* TERMINOLOGY. THIS IS A BASIC GUIDE FOR BEGINNERS AND THOSE WHO BELIEVE THEY CAN GET THROUGH LIFE WITHOUT DISCOVERING THE KLINGON WORD FOR "EXCREMENT".

Bird of Prey Klingon starship, so named because of its vaguely hawk-like shape.
Communicator A device used by Federation officers to communicate across large distances. Looks a bit like an electric razor.
Federation Short for The United Federation of Planets, a kind of 23rd Century UN that stretches across galaxies but has its HQ

in America (of course).
IDIC Stands for "Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations". Both a Vulcan philosophy and a way for the late Gene Roddenberry to sell IDIC medallions through his mail-order business.
Klingon The enemy of the Federation, this war-like race believes in supremacy by strength and honour in battle.
Koon-ut-kal-if-fee The Vulcan mating ritual.

Vulcan males must go through it every seven years or face an agonising death. (If only human males could use that excuse!).
Live long and prosper A Vulcan saying, similar to "Have a nice day". Roddenberry never figured out a way to cash in on this one.
Mind-meld A telepathic link Vulcans can establish between themselves and other

beings. Useful for writers when they want to disguise their exposition.
Neck pinch Probably the most famous piece of Vulcanalia, Spock frequently uses this technique to incapacitate unruly humans without causing them any lasting harm.
Phaser The standard handheld weapon of a Federation officer. Can be set to either kill or stun depending on whether that episode's scriptwriter is a member of the NRA.
Photon torpedo The Enterprise's main weapon. Makes a bit

of a wussy sound considering its awesome power.
Prime Directive In essence, The Prime Directive forbids any Starfleet officer from mucking about with a planet's natural evolution – no excuses.
Transporter Devised so Paramount didn't have to blow money on expensive effects shots, this technology breaks objects down to their basic components and reforms them elsewhere, eg, the surface of a planet.
Shields A force-field generated to act as armour for a starship.

By all accounts, pretty flimsy and useless, becoming ineffective after a couple of hits.
Starfleet The collective name for the Federation's convoy of spacecraft. Retains all the conventions of the navy (except, perhaps, buggery with wooden implements).
Vulcan The rather barren planet that, logically enough, is home to Vulcans.
Warp drive The technology that allows the Enterprise to travel faster than the speed of light. Measured in "factors" 'cause it sounds futuristic.